



Pre-Interview Discussion

This interview was conducted on May 18, 2000. Mark Madison (Mark), US Fish and Wildlife Service, Helen Fenske (Helen), Bill Koch (Bill), US Fish and Wildlife Service were present. The interview was conducted as part of an oral history preservation project by NCTC.

Tape Helen —

...lived this long to see it because I'd been very discouraged about it. But when we first were trying to create this, and get the Fish and Wildlife involved, there was a very important meeting up in Boston with John Gottschalk. John Gottschalk was rather a remarkable bureaucrat, because he was a *can-do* kind of person, which is sometimes a bit hard to find a bureaucracy.

And he came up with the idea, and he wrote us a letter as a result of this meeting, that this would be a showcase for wildlife education in the entire nation because it was in reach, of a couple of hours of 40-60 million people. And he carried that through. We wrote a couple of speeches for [Stuart] Udall. It was a showcase for wildlife education, it would showcase the refuge system in the metropolitan area, particularly in the northeast. Know what the refuge system is all about. You're out in the boonies and you don't have that kind of audience. And it would make a tremendous difference. But when Udall came up, he made two or three visits, one was an enormous dinner. There was a period for a long time when people did not buck the NY Port Authority. It had never been defeated ever, before or since, for that matter. I mean it was something that was politically impossible to do.

So it was tough going. We had a big, big dinner down at the Far Hills Inn, and Udall came in and he gave this speech, it was "Showcase for Wildlife Education", I think it was John Gottschalk that drafted the speech, I know he drafted the speech, and then Thoreau's quote "a town is saved, not more by the righteous man in it, than by the woods and swamps that surround it". Well, we used that — we worked that so that everybody in this area knew what it was all about.

Now, if we're on, I'd like to go back, because in the very beginnings, it was a very amateurish, almost spontaneous kind of concept in terms of trying to turn this area into a wildlife refuge.

Actually, it started before the jetport. Most people think it was the jetport, but there was a couple by the name of Grace and Jim Hand, that lived in Green Village, involved in the Audubon, they were birders, amateur botanists. Jim was a chemical engineer with a research mind, and he had documented the migrations of the birds and the plants that they had found as they were tramping all throughout. So there was a beginning documentation of how valuable this was.

There were two battles that took place before the jetport battle. One had to do with a tract of land in Green Village that was going to go into an apartment house. There was a huge battle about that, and we began to rally around. And in order to get a basis for that, we had to find a management entity that would take on this property and buy it. Backed up to M. Hartley Dodge estate. M. Hartley Dodge was owner, CEO, I think of Remington Arms, and was already well known. He was the North American Wildlife Foundation and all that. Well, it backed up to his estate, and as a result of that, the Morris County Park Commission was formed, out of that battle. But the justification, what was it, this is still part of the Great Swamp basin.

The other had to do with a pipeline that was going to plough through, did finally plough through, but there was a huge battle about that. But out of the woodwork came a science teacher, (whose name escapes me, I will remember before we are over...) he was a geologist, his classes were all about the Great Swamp, that it was unique, that it was a bowl, that it was a closed ecosystem. Why was it? And



out of it, I think you're going to see the model. It is a closed system, the glacier came down, and this is the heart of Great Swamp—came down—the Wisconsin Glacier, and it formed the upper Passaic Valley wetlands. But the terminal end was down here, it didn't have an outlet, but eventually it did wear away an outlet which is the Millington Gorge. Now the same amount of water was flowing out of that Millington Gorge back in the fifties, or even in the twenties, as is flowing out today, it's a given. And this is a bowl, the bottom of lake Passaic, but the glacier melted here and it left a variety of lands quite different from the rest of the upper Passaic Valley. You have meadows, you have sandy knolls with oak, beech, rhododendron, laurel; you have swamp as most people envision swamps, and meadows and so forth.

What I didn't know at the time was it was a lot of research to be had. So you had the pipeline and the other issue that began to surface it, and of course, this news was leaked about Great Swamp. The old Newark Evening News, which was the primary newspaper for the state, leaked it just before Christmas, that the miserable area called Great Swamp was going to be the site of the world's largest international jetport, and all hell broke out.

Well, there were rallies and political activism began to organize to try and stop it. Governor Meyner, who was our governor at that time, was for this jetport. So that made it difficult. But there was a small group of people, I was one, the Hands, and there was a woman by the name of Mrs. Josephine Lloyd, got around a kitchen table. My kitchen table is famous. It's fine to fight it, but you have to have something to replace it with, you just can't oppose it. You've gotta have something that is going to say "the Swamp". And that is when the concept of trying to establish a national wildlife refuge here began.

Mark — did you ever think of trying to propose a park instead of a refuge?

Helen — well, there was a park, but it was very pragmatic. A state park or a local park would not stop the New York Port Authority. The only thing we could think of was to bump it up to the Federal level. Well, would this qualify as a wildlife refuge?

We couldn't interest the US Fish and Wildlife initially. They were interested in Troy Meadows, which is just pure swamp, one kind of habitat. And the man who headed the Morris County Park, and that was a new system, a fellow from the Corps of Engineers, his name was Russell Meyers, he was a landscape architect, he said, "I think we're missing the boat. We need to go to the regional office." Here we were directing everything down to Washington and nothing was happening down there, we need to make a visit up to Boston. So Russell made arrangements, this was our first contact with John Gottschalk.

John was reluctant at first—come to find out his nose was a little out of joint—nobody had contacted him up to this point, and the show was up there, you know how the regional offices are. So, he said, yes, he'd give us a half an hour at eight o'clock in the morning. We went up there the night before, and arrived there with our projector. It was Grace Hand and myself, but we had slides, and our projector, and John had gathered all his people round him, and we went through what I call our dog-and-pony show.

What was Great Swamp? It was all of these habitats, it was all of these plants of the north and plants of the south, and it was a closed ecosystem, it was unique, and we didn't get out of John's office until lunchtime. And then he offered to drive us to the airport, and he came down the following week, and he said, "Okay, what you've got to do is get all your information together. This is not a typical area that we look at and we give a high priority to."

So, we went to the universities. We have three universities here in spitting distance, even then I did not realize that they were using this area as their own laboratories. So, there's Drew University, there's an exceptional department of botany and biology there, and we lined them up. There was a College of St.



Elizabeth, which is an all woman-university. Fabulous Sister, by the name of Sister Anna Katherine, who headed the biology department, she loved all these lower forms of life and she collected from all the streams here, she had it all documented, and she took her students out. Never—can you picture this, this was when they were in these black habits, and I'd go out with her. She'd gather up her skirts there and scoop up all these things, and pet all these things and I can see her today...she would just rave about all these little critters. Now you've gotta know that I didn't know a bluebird from a blue-jay at this point, so this was very much a learning exercise for me. But what we did, was get together all of the scientific people, teachers and so forth, that had any knowledge of Great Swamp and just sort of amassed a tremendous amount of information, and that became the basis for attempting to sell the Fish and Wildlife, they were reluctant partners in the beginning, very reluctant, and it was after we had gotten this together that they began to see this for what it would be.

So, the second visit to John Gottschalk was in order. We had done what he told us to do, we were back, and he said "okay." At that point, Mr. Meyers, Russ Meyers...we decided that we were not going to leave without getting something in our hand. What we got on that second visit was a letter from John Gottschalk, saying that this was a showcase for wildlife education, and all the poetry that went with that, that we could publicize; we got a commitment from him that they would put up a sign saying that this area was proposed for a national wildlife refuge. *Never mind that we didn't know whether it would be or not — which I thought was very courageous of him.* I think today, I wonder whether the Fish and Wildlife would go out on a limb, particularly against someone like the New York Port Authority. And he promised that if got enough money to purchase 3,000 acres, that's when the Fish and Wildlife would come in, open an office and assign a refuge manager.

In essence, as you see on the map, the swamp is divided between what is now the wilderness area, which is over in Chatham Township, and the management area. The Fish and Wildlife could justify purchasing some of this land, but the land on the other side, is what we would have to buy, *we*, meaning the Great Swamp Committee.

So, the campaign started. Now, the history of Great Swamp is that the settlers came in 1700 and lived in the ridges, this was a swamp area, and owned woodlots down here, so there were hundreds of woodlots. Many of them forgotten, so, probably one of the biggest issues, and I'm not sure if Cam has this in her book, was to overcome the requirement that the Federal Government had, that they had to have guaranteed titles. We had hundreds of woodlots, trying to find the owners. If we did find them, suddenly they saw dollar signs, and so forth.

So, that was a big hurdle to overcome. In the process of trying to solve that, we found a tract of land that William Penn had received over in Green Village. In fact, another organization that I'm involved in just purchased it. But, there are only two William Penn markers of the Land Grant that was given to William Penn, and one of them is out there on this tract of land which is adjacent to this refuge land. And from that, we could build the surveys and the title.

Now, that seems like a minor point. But the title situation, and being able to turn this land over and have the Federal Government (agree), was a major obstacle. I mean, once we'd sold the Fish and Wildlife on it, but, they were not going to invest any money and left it up to us to solve these problems.

So that solved that problem. Then came the issue of...we were publicizing, we were on TV, we were always on the front pages of the New York Times, the Newark Evening News, it was an issue that you just can't believe. I don't know if we hadn't had the publicity, and the importance of this, that we could have pulled this off. I mean looking back, it seemed like an obstacle at the time, but that was the rather remarkable part. That's what gave us some of the publicity across the country.



But, we were still stopped on all of these hundreds of tracts of land, some of them as small as a couple of acres. How do you do it? Finally we came up with the idea that most of it was tax delinquent, and that the town, Chatham Township would swap this land. There were two ways that that the town could divest itself of these lands. Hold an auction, we certainly didn't want that, or swap the land. So, they agreed that if we would buy enough land for a ballpark, why, it's okay.

Well, when it came to the bottom line, they decided they could get more out of us than just a little ballpark, so we had to buy considerably more and that took another year. There was always this problem of *you're not going to do it, no one has ever defeated the jetport*. So you couldn't get the big money. And, it was a terrible struggle. Five, ten, twenty-five, fifty, a one-hundred dollar contribution was a big contribution. In the process of going around with our projectors and so forth, there was an arrangement for us to go into New York to address the Garden Club of America. Now, many people would dismiss the Garden Club of America, but if I were to start over again, I'd start with that organization.

They are the wives of the wealthy, the CEOs and so forth, so this was a little executive committee of maybe about fifteen people. It was a big deal for me to get a baby sitter, and get in there, I had all these little kids running around, and we did our dog-and-pony and I was the only one there. I thought practically everybody had fallen asleep. Two or three weeks after that I picked up the mail, and opened the envelope, and out fluttered a check for \$75,000. Right, \$75,000!

And there was one woman who had stayed awake. She was Cornelius (?) May, and she was a Mellon, and from Legionere (?) Pennsylvania or Ohio – anyway, she sent the \$75,000.

And about 2 months after that, I got a phone call from out west, from Pittsburgh, and it was a very pleasant man, he was flying into Teterboro, he had a date up in Morristown, and would I have a moment to have a cup of coffee with him, he didn't have much time, was there a place somewhere between Teterboro and Morristown? And I said, "yes, there's the Nautilus Diner in Madison (we call it the "nauseous diner", but anyway – laughter). He said, "how will I know you", and I described myself, and he said "alright". So, I was out at the Nautilus Diner about 9:30 and in strides a very tall handsome man, he grabbed a cup of coffee, sat down and he said "I haven't got much time, but I want you to read this" and he reached in and he handed me an envelope, and there was another hundred-thousand. Now those were the first two big checks, those were the first real money we had gotten, and it came from [*unsure of name?*] from the Mellons, they have a number of foundations. So we were able to do quite a bit of publicity on that, and out of that came quite a bit of commitment from the Garden Clubs, all across the country to save Great Swamp. And they began to buy acreage, \$100 an acre. We have a list here of all the Garden Clubs. Today they will come and say "where's our acre?". (laughter)

But, they were very important, and it was a crusade very similar to what I had seen in terms of the Redwoods and so on, and that was very useful to us because when they had hearings on the Wilderness down before Congress, it was the westerners who were giving us trouble, and it was the Garden Clubs out in the west who were giving *them* trouble. And they finally folded. And I can't say enough about the commitment they had...it was wonderful.

We got to 1964 with enough money for 3,000 acres, and Udall promised to come up and dedicate it (the Refuge).

I should talk about another man who was very important to us, his name was Donald H. McLean from Summit, he was a lawyer for the Rockefeller Brothers, and had been involved in the saving of the Pallisades for Lawrence Rockefeller. And his wife was president of the Summit Garden Club, also a part of the Garden Club of America Garden Club. I was always trying to reach out to where the big money was.



A lot of the inherited wealth around here was in Summit and Short Hills. The Short Hills Mall, are you familiar with it? was owned by the Prudential – a big mall. And they had a huge store that they had not yet rented out. I dug up the manager, a Prudential representative, and they offered us this store which was about 75 feet long, it was enormous, and we put on an exhibit, volunteers, directed and designed by a very talented artist called Nature's Showcase. Nature as seen through the photographer, through the gardener, through the teacher...and it was all pulled together with color, and with beautiful exhibits. And we had it on exhibit, and manned by the garden clubs for almost two months. Teachers would go through as they were shopping, and they would go back and make arrangements to bring their kids and their classes down.

Out of that, the chairman of that exhibit was Martha McClean, and that led us to Donald McClean. And she kept talking to her husband, saying "Donald, you really ought to get into this". Now this man was not an environmentalist, he was a skilled entrepreneur who was good at extracting money out of people's pockets before they knew they'd lost it, truly. And he began to get involved, he said, "yes, he'd help us raise the money."

We estimated that we needed three million dollars for the rest of the land. We got John Gottschalk down, we organized fundraising, the steppingstone was the cocktail party, and before we left the cocktail party, we had commitments for a million, just out of that one. He was incredible. His motto to me, his direction to me, he said, "you make this all too complicated, it's really very simple. You only need **three WWWs. Who does the work**, that's obviously you Helen and your troops. **Who makes the decision**, that's Gottschalk and Udall, and **Who has the money**? It's as simple as that."

In about three months he'd raised about five-million dollars for us. And he translated it in terms of everybody's stake. Instead of the poetry, I was always out there with the birds and the bees, and so forth. What stake do you have in this? He was just incredible. We had the money. We did not have the land, we still had some title problems. But, he said, "it's time for the Fish and Wildlife to get off its butt."

He decided to go to Washington, set up a date through some of his contacts, Larry Rockefeller probably helped him, sat down with Stuart Udall and John Gottschalk was there, and before we left they promised us a date. Udall finally gave us a date with only two or three weeks leeway, could we pull it off? And we were not sure.

As a matter of fact, we did not have the date when we left there, but a promise that we would have it. There's a cute story about Don. Stuart Udall was coming up to visit Larry Rockefeller a few weeks after we had visited, and Don said okay, he had everybody posted. The building had 56 floors. When Udall got on the elevator to leave Lawrence Rockefeller, guess who was on the elevator...it was Don McClean. By the time they reached the bottom floor, Udall had made a commitment.

That was indicative of what this whole project was about, there was always someone like that, whether it was scientific information, or someone to open the door, there they were. I was just a housewife. I didn't have any of the skills. I learned. I have an entrepreneuring instinct, but I knew nothing about how to put a project of this size together.

So, these are pictures of the dedication. You had everybody there. It was on Hartley Dodge's estate that overlooks the refuge. This shows the three thousand acres that we had to pull together, that's why that is filled in, and this is where the Fish and Wildlife finally took over and has been filling it in. This is Governor Hughes, President Nixon of Drew, everybody that was anybody was up on the stage. Those of us that had done the work, we were out there behind the oak tree trying to see what was going on.



But we put it together, there were thousands that came, and it was a great occasion. So okay, they dedicated the Refuge and the Office was opened up down here, there must be pictures of the office too, the first office, and everybody said "phew, we did it". The Port Authority was still around, that's 1964, and all of a sudden everybody who said they were environmentalists—were *not* environmentalists. They said this was the only place for the highway, or the sewer plant, and so forth, and we began to see the erosion.

I was in the office one day and just happened to be reading something about the wilderness, and there was just this little clause in that thing **"and/or islands of wilderness", I mean, it's in there, bingo!**

Islands of wilderness, this is what we're called, Islands of Wilderness.

So I called the Wilderness Society, Rupert Cutler. Well I read this thing, got a hold of Rupert, I did not know him at the time, but he began to help me over the phone. Short time after he said you can't do it from up there. Get your butt down here, and I'll show you how to do it. Rupert was really the one who led us around, and trained us, if you will, on how to lobby congress. Walking in, talking to anybody, have your information handy, and so forth. And he stuck with us until we got the hearing on the wilderness legislation.

He helped us orchestrate, you can get someone like Dr. Oxnum...and say, will you testify?—this is one thing I learned the hard way. *Yeah, but I haven't got time, and I haven't got time to research it or write the speech.* So you have to write the speeches. That's when I learned, that's how you get the important people to say things, you write their speeches, like Gottschalk wrote Udall's. So we wrote speeches.

This dedication, I've forgotten how many spoke there, but, quite a few. We put it together in ten days, and we were working on it. This wonderful woman from Mendham, Madeline Borman, called me on a Sunday afternoon and said, "how can I help?"

"Madeline, I've got the worst job," I said, "I've got to write all these speeches."

She said, "I'll be right down."

So she put me in an outer office, and I wrote down what I thought each of these people should say. And she crafted it. Not one of them deviated, except for Pete Guttermuth. Did you know him? He was Washington-based, and he was a contrary individual, and he wrote his own speech...but anyway.

And it just was wonderful, but I can't say enough about Rupert Cutler. I was a real novice, and I was at the stage where a good project would obviously pass through Congress because it was a good project. You know, projects don't pass because they're good projects (laughter).

He was very important. But one of the things that I thought our group did, and it was instinctive, but there were a lot of people who were involved, who gave programs, who gave speeches, or conducted tours or contributed. We were great with the opportunity we had with the media to give everybody credit. And even today, you when you see someone who's died, and you see the list of their accomplishments... *and they saved Great Swamp!*

But, everyone felt they had a stake in it, they either bought an acre, or had done something towards it. It was a groundswell that I've never seen since then on any of the projects that I've had.

Mark — so how did the Wilderness Designation Progress, what did Rupert have you all do?



Helen — we had a hearing. I've forgotten whether we had the hearing first I think we had some hearings before Congress. And we had a tough time with Wayne Aspenall. But there were a couple of legislators, as I understand it, there was one from Indiana who used to live out here in Long Hill, and was on the committee, and he just wasn't going to have those westerners telling him what to do with the open space that he used to travel in. And, the Garden Club ladies. We sent out an S.O.S.

There was something that Rupe did that was really very important. And he always treated me as if I had just arrived in kindergarten, but there was this list, I don't know whether it was 12 or 15 steps that a piece of legislation has to go through. Well we took that outline that Rupert had done, and we used that specifically for the contributors, but it was again, the Audubon, and the Garden Club of America. We would photocopy that and send it out and say "now we're at step four, here's what you want to do." And they stuck with us on each one of those steps, it was an incredibly useful tool.

They stuck with it, and finally, we got through the legislation, and then I guess it came to the hearing. They scheduled it at the nature education center (I'm hoping you get over there because they have a nice model of the geologic formation), and there was no way that we could get people in. So we had the Governor Morris Hotel lined up as a reserve, and the hearing went all day, and into the night. And, I'm not sure, but I think there was only one or two voices (objecting) and they were from the labor unions who saw jobs in the jetport. But it was an incredible day. So the Wilderness Legislation was one, if not the last pieces of legislation that President Johnson signed before he went out. Ladybird Johnson threw a luncheon, I have a picture of that down at the White House, to thank everybody that was involved in her Natural Beauty thing down at the White House. I was the speaker at that. You have no idea how incredible that occasion was to be invited to the White House to talk about Great Swamp.

There's a program, it's in my files.

We talk about the second battle of Great Swamp, it was tougher than the first battle. The second battle is all the erosion.

(Picture of White House Luncheon discussed...Russell Meyers, Dr. Oxnum)

For me it was a college education, and I used what I learned on that over and over again. Particularly the slogan of the WWWs, that really cuts your muddle time in half. Who makes the decision...

Hughes was important in it, I think the Hands, Mr. And Mrs. Hand, the three universities for all their data and their support. John Gottschalk was absolutely pivotal. The Garden Club of America, and the National Audubon Society.

Now you've got to remember, put it in context, this was before Earth Day, before the Clean Water Act, all of that legislation. Many people today in New Jersey see it as the beginning as a lot of things that happened in New Jersey, maybe even nationally. And I think that that made it rather remarkable.

Rupe Cutler — we never would have gotten the Wilderness thing without him, and I'd love to make sure that he's noted. And I'd love to know what he has, he was great — he was great — get your butt down here...

What else can I tell you?

There have been a lot of accolades. Probably rather, I think, in terms of the second battle, but how it reflects on the first battle was the big issue that extended over 10 years and had to do with putting an enlarged sewer plant on one of the streams here.



I was the assistant commissioner down at the DEP, and the decision was down there, and I fought it internally. This was not to be a cesspool. The engineers in the DEP could not see any reason why you can't enlarge that sewer plant. Out of it came this tremendous battle, there was an advisory committee set up to make recommendations on how to protect Great Swamp, out of it has emerged the Ten Towns Committee. All the towns that are in the range of the Great Swamp now, in fact most of them have a set of ordinances that protect the streams, like the runoff ordinances, and so forth. There's also an effort to do a restoration project similar to the Everglades here, so that battle continues. It's been a tough battle.

Governor Whitman who talks a good line, but doesn't act a good line, was going to fold on the sewer issue. The major developer was the Prudential, ironically, up on the Dodge Estate. So how to impress her? I went to Governor Keane who is now the President of Drew, and I asked him if I could have his big gymnasium to throw a party. He gave it to me. I had never been into it. It's a huge new gymnasium, it has five tennis courts in it—that's how big it is. He said, okay. And we threw a party. But I looked at that gym and I thought, I've done it. Now, I've really done it this time, we will never fill this place up. But we had about 2,000 and we were turning people away. This was in 1994.

Turning them away, we filled it! The governor was there, and she looked out. The key to that was my secretary, she knows where every cent came from. We still had that mailing list, of course, many people had moved on, addresses weren't right. But they still were there. We were going to hand them out a little pin that you could use for your tie, and so forth, with a symbol of the Great Blue Heron, people came.

...They all had a stake on it, and that was the insurance policy. Now the battle still continues. But then comes the issue of trying to get what Udall had promised which was "this was a showcase, and you haven't even got a visitors center."...We'll I've given Bill a hard time on it.

(leafing through photos)

I've turned over a lot of the records to the Great Swamp Committee.

Thank Yous.

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